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RUEHSM/AMEMBASSY STOCKHOLM 0228
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS
RUEHDS/USMISSION USAU ADDIS ABABA
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 NOUAKCHOTT 000698

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [MR](#)

SUBJECT: TAWASSOUL: PUSH TO STRENGTHEN POLITICAL PRESENCE
FINDS LUKEWARM SUPPORT AMONG IMAMS

REF: A. NOUAKCHOTT 659

[1](#)B. NOUAKCHOTT 505

Classified By: Ambassador Mark M. Boulware for reasons 1.5 (b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (C) Moderate Islamist party Tawassoul has been one of the few winners in the past year of political crisis -- successfully establishing itself as a credible political movement and poised to expand its influence. This political party, affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood, which Taya's government would not recognize and set out to repress, went on to join the government under President Sidi Ould Cheikh Abdallahi. Abdallahi's inclusion of Tawassoul in the political process raised red flags with the majority and was one of the justifications for the coup d'etat. After playing an active role in the anti-coup coalition Front National pour la Defense de la Democratie (FNDD), Tawassoul parted ways with the FNDD and decided to run an independent candidate in the July 18 presidential election. Now, to everybody's surprise, the party that the majority once rejected is fielding a common list with majority party Union Pour la Republique (UPR) for the November senatorial elections (Ref A) and Tawassoul President Jemil Ould Mansour is optimistic that President Aziz will offer the Islamists a cabinet position in a future government (Ref B).

[1](#)2. (C) PolOff met on October 21 with Mansour to discuss Tawassoul's future and partnership with majority party UPR for the upcoming senatorial elections. Mansour stated that Tawassoul's current strategy is focused on reinforcing its base and political presence in Mauritania. According to him, Tawassoul remains a middle-ground opposition party and its alliance with UPR is currently motivated by electoral ambitions but it could eventually lead to a permanent relationship. According to Mansour, there are commonalities between President Aziz's and Tawassoul's program. Given the right conditions, Tawassoul would be willing to join the government. Those conditions include a comprehensive dialogue about the government's program and Tawassoul's objectives as well as freedom for Tawassoul's ministers to implement their programs. "We are political partners, we don't follow orders," stressed Mansour. Comment: There have been widespread rumors that Aziz's ministers have no leeway to exercise their functions and that they merely follow orders from the top. Mansour's comment seems to confirm these rumors. End comment.

[1](#)3. (C) Given Tawassoul's controversial role in Mauritania's

political landscape, PolOff met with various Oulema -- influential imams -- to inquire about their views on Tawassoul. They all agree that the political process should be open to anybody interested in participating. Nevertheless, they unanimously rejected any Tawassoul aspiration to monopolize Islam, stating that Tawassoul is one Muslim party among many and one school of thought among others in this almost exclusively Islamic country. Tawassoul, they argue, introduces foreign currents that do not represent traditional Mauritanian Islam, which is Maliki, Suni and organized around brotherhoods. Comment: Brotherhoods are Islamic societies gathering the faithful around cheikhs who teach Islam according to the tradition of their spiritual leaders. The most influential brotherhoods in Mauritania are the Tidjani and the Khadria. This phenomenon is typical to West Africa where the brotherhoods have tremendous power and influence, including across borders. End comment. Imam Hademine Ould Saleck from the Ibn Abass Institute openly stated that there was dissension among many Islamic schools of thought and that many did not agree with Tawassoul's principles. Tawassoul is perceived as an exclusive group of people that politicizes Islam and that is seeking power. Imam Abass Diaby stressed that none of the Oulema belong to Tawassoul despite having been approached by Tawassoul for support. Imam Hamden Ould Tah, President of the Oulema Association, dismissed Tawassoul as a fad, a party that appeals to young people who are looking to experience new and foreign ideologies -- just like the Communist party a few decades ago. Imam Mohamed El Hafedh Ould Enahoui, President of the Cultural Islamic Group, does think that Tawassoul's participation in government should be accompanied

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by the participation of other Sufi Islamic currents to balance a potential Tawassoul tendency to want to present itself as the sole representative of Islamic thought. Imam Hamden stated that the difference between Tawassoul and the Oulema is that the Oulema were willing to work with those in government to ensure the government included Islam whereas Tawassoul had a political agenda that aimed at forcibly bringing Islam to the government through the acquisition of political power. Tawassoul, he states, does not have the right to monopolize a universal concept that belongs to all like Islam. None of the imams passed judgment on President Aziz's change of mind regarding Tawassoul's participation, highlighting that they were all "on the side of power." Imam Enahoui stated Aziz's new tolerance for Tawassoul was motivated by this party's timely recognition of Aziz's win and that it was only normal that Tawassoul wished to be on Aziz's good side to avoid being persecuted.

14. (C) Comment: With less than five percent in the July 18 election but with an impressive nine parliamentarians, Tawassoul remains an influential voice among Mauritania's major political players. With its sense of discipline and strategy, it emerges as one of the winners of the political crisis and, ironically, it is apparently poised to acquire more influence under an Aziz government. As one of the imams stated, one should not forget that being part of the government in Mauritania means access to resources and power that generate more resources and power. Nevertheless, Mauritaniens remain wary of political Islam and foreign influences. Tawassoul's support among religious and political leaders -- and even among the population -- remains limited. To an extent, the traditional ulema see Tawassoul as a potential contender for their leadership role. Even though the Tawassoul leadership presents itself as moderate -- indeed, they have worked well with the embassy -- many in politics and religious leadership fear an Algeria-like effort to put on a friendly face and use the democratic system for decidedly undemocratic purposes. The FNDD opposition leaders now complain about their former Tawassoul partners as "Aziz moles" because they so quickly recognized the elections and are willing to work with Aziz. Tawassoul will say they accepted the elections because they have better grass roots ties than the other opposition parties and saw that the

elections did, in fact, reflect the will of the people. Their goal of restoring constitutional rule attained, they were willing to work with Aziz to ensure their political relevance. End comment.

BOULWARE